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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000400

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STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2016
TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: SOYINKA WILLING TO APPEAL TO HOSTAGE TAKERS

Classified By: Acting Political/Economic Chief Shannon Ross
for reasons 1.4 (D/E).

Summary

11. (C) Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka offered to deliver messages from the USG to the hostage-takers. He said he was in contact with the hostage-takers and would be meeting with one of their representatives in Enugu on Saturday, March 18. He confirmed they exchanged communication by e-mail, and that he had approached the Federal Government about the possibility of negotiating with the hostage-takers.

Soyinka Willing to Take Messages to Hostage-Takers

12. (C) In a meeting with LegAtt and PolOff on March 17, Nobel laureate Professor Wole Soyinka expressed willingness to act as an unbiased third-party during negotiations between the GON and the kidnappers who took 9 expatriate oil workers hostage on February 18. He said he had already been contacted by them through e-mail and had begun speaking with GON representatives to learn their attitude toward engaging in dialogue with the hostage takers. He said the GON's initial response was lukewarm, especially given President Obasanjo's present dislike of him, but he felt a negotiation process would occur and the hostages would be released.

Soyinka Will Meet with Kidnapper Representative Tomorrow

13. (C) Soyinka said he returned to Nigeria for a March 18 meeting of the PRONACO political reform conference in Enugu, the main purpose of which is to voice opposition to a third term and strategize to increase the revenue derivation percentage for oil-producing states. He said PRONACO would release a statement after the meeting, which would include an appeal for the release of the hostages.

14. (C) Soyinka said he had been contacted by the

hostage-takers to set up a meeting with their representative at the PRONACO meeting in Enugu. He does not know the relationship between the hostage-takers and the person he is scheduled to meet. However, he said the news that USG negotiators were in Nigeria to assist the GON, if asked, would be welcomed by the hostage-takers, and he offered to carry any messages we wished to pass to them. LegAtt agreed to send him an e-mail containing some talking points, including emphasis on the fact the hostage-takers had already gotten their plight on the world stage, that the hostages were therefore more value to them if released, and that they were innocent, blue-collar workers without any stake in the political issues at hand.

Soyinka Believes Asari is Key

15. (C) Soyinka believes that the GON will have to release arrested militant leader Dokubo Asari in order to prove to the kidnappers that they will not take military action against them as soon as the hostages are released. He was optimistic that the GON would eventually agree to Asari's release. (Comment: To the contrary, we have not seen any indication of GON willingness to release Asari. The Attorney General is chief prosecutor, establishing the case as a national priority, which may make it difficult for the GON to backpedal. End Comment.) He said the government had arrested Asari because they erroneously thought he had financed PRONACO and was behind its anti-third-term agenda. Soyinka deplored Asari's arrest and said he was in touch with Asari's wife and could pass messages to him through her.

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Comment

16. (C) Whether or not Soyinka can have any influence on the Delta crisis is not clear. He says the hostage-takers contacted him by e-mail and asked for his intervention, and he says he is in touch with them now and can pass messages to them. He is currently out-of-favor with the GON and could, perhaps, encounter further resistance to his involvement. He plans to leave for Paris immediately after the PRONACO conference, and so his extended absence from the country will also limit his potential involvement. End Comment.
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